

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE USE
Sept. 27, 2004

Contact: Doug Schultz
MDH Communications Office
(651) 215-1303

Dr. Joni Scheftel
State Public Health Veterinarian
(612) 676-5414

Malissa Fritz
Board of Animal Health Communications
(651) 296-2942, ext. 35

Health officials investigate rabies cases in puppies in Thief River Falls area

Two puppies die of rabies; whereabouts of four unknown; one ill puppy taken to school sports events

State health officials are seeking the public's help in locating the whereabouts of four puppies, possibly exposed to rabies, that were sold between Aug. 25 and Sept. 10 from a farm near Viking, Minnesota in Marshall County. The puppies came from a litter of 10 black and yellow Labrador retrievers.

Rabies has been diagnosed in two puppies from the litter. One of the two puppies was taken to a number of school sporting events in Thief River Falls. Officials are trying to locate all individuals who may have had saliva contact with this puppy. The other ill puppy had limited contact outside the Marshall County family to which it was sold.

Minnesota Board of Animal Health (BAH) Assistant Director Dr. Kris Petrini said it is important that the owners of the four puppies are located. "Each of these littermates is at risk of developing rabies," said Petrini. "We need everyone's help to find the puppies, which could potentially expose anyone they come into contact with to the virus."

The litter was born on July 18, 2004 on a farm two miles west of Viking, Minn. in Marshall County. All of the puppies were sold between Aug. 25 and Sept. 10, through advertisements in the Grand Forks Herald and the Thief River Falls Times. On Aug. 28, the puppies were apparently attacked by a skunk (no skunk was found on the property). Seven of the puppies were sold after the skunk attack, before the owners realized the rabies risk involved.

Investigators with the BAH and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) have not been able to locate four of the 10 puppies. Anyone with information on the whereabouts of these 10-week-old puppies is asked to call the BAH (Minnesota residents) at 651-296-2942 or Larry Shireley, North Dakota Department of Health (North Dakota residents) at 701-328-2378.

-more-

The first puppy that died became ill on Sept. 16 and died on Sept. 19. The diagnosis of rabies was confirmed on Sept. 23. MDH investigators believe that everyone who had saliva-contact with this puppy (sold to a family in Marshall County, Minn.) has been notified and those affected have sought medical advice.

The second puppy was sold to a family in Thief River Falls on Sept. 10, first became ill on Sept. 17, and died on Sept. 22. “There was no way to predict that this healthy-appearing, black lab puppy was infected with rabies until it developed the typical neurologic symptoms well into the illness,” said State Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Joni Scheftel.

The puppy was brought to the Lincoln High School football game on Sept. 10, the fourth and fifth grade boy’s flag football practice at the Franklin Middle School Field on Sept. 11, the tennis court at Franklin Middle School, a junior varsity football game on Sept. 14, a sixth grade football scrimmage on Sept. 16, and possibly other public events. **Anyone who had saliva-contact with this puppy should call their health care provider and the Minnesota Department of Health (612-676-5414) to discuss the need for rabies prevention vaccinations.**

Rabies is spread by the bite of an animal with rabies. Less commonly, rabies may be spread by getting saliva into an open wound or cut on the skin, or by getting saliva into the eyes or mouth, which might happen if a puppy licked you generously on the face. Simply petting or holding a puppy with rabies will not spread the virus and does not require treatment. For more information about rabies, please call the Minnesota Department of Health (612-676-5414 or toll free, 877-676-5414), or see the MDH Web site at www.health.state.mn.us.

-MDH-